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ABSTRACT

This two-part investigation attempted to formulate culturally sensitive definitions of desirable and undesirable attachment behavior. Participants were 3 sociocultural groups of 16 mothers each: middle-class Anglo mothers, lower-class Anglo mothers, and lower-class Puerto Rican mothers living on the U.S. mainland. All mothers had at least 1 child between the ages of 12 and 24 months. In Study 1, indigenous concepts of desirable and undesirable attachment behavior were elicited using open-ended probes. Mothers were asked to describe: (1) qualities they would and would not like their children to possess as they grew older; (2) a toddler they knew with positive qualities and one with negative qualities; and (3) how each toddler would behave in a situation designed to simulate the phases of the Strange Situation. On the basis of mothers' responses, culturally sensitive vignettes of desirable and undesirable Strange Situation behavior were constructed, and culturally relevant descriptors of toddler characteristics were selected. In Study 2, mothers' perceptions of the hypothetical toddlers in the culturally sensitive vignettes were compared, both in terms of their relative overall desirability as well as in terms of the culturally relevant descriptors of toddler characteristics. Findings indicated that mothers' culturally derived values influence the meanings they give to individual differences in Strange Situation behavior. (RH)

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# CULTURE AND NORMATIVE DEVELOPMENTAL MODELS: ANGLO AND PUERTO RICAN MOTHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF ATTACHMENT BEHAVIOR

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## Abstract

This two-part investigation attempted to formulate culturally-sensitive definitions of desirable and undesirable attachment behavior.

In Study 1, indigenous concepts of desirable and undesirable attachment behavior were elicited using open-ended probes. On the basis of mothers' responses, culturally-sensitive vignettes of desirable and undesirable Strange Situation behavior were constructed, and culturally-relevant descriptors of toddler characteristics were selected.

In Study 2, mothers' perceptions of the hypothetical toddlers in the culturally-sensitive vignettes were compared, both in terms of their relative overall desirability as well as in terms of the culturally-relevant descriptors of toddler characteristics.

## Aims

1) Culturally-sensitive definitions of normative social behavior in toddlers were formulated using concepts indigenous to three sociocultural groups.

2) Comparative research was conducted using vignettes and descriptors relevant to the meaning system of each participating group, thus rendering the sociocultural elements in models of normative behavior more apparent.

3) In so doing, this investigation demonstrates the limits of applicability intrinsic to all normative models, as well as enriches the individualistic models used by American researchers through an examination of models indigenous to other cultures.

## Method

### Subjects

Three sociocultural groups (16 mothers in each group for Study 1, and 16 mothers in each group for Study 2, for a total of 96 mothers) were examined: middle- and lower-class Anglo mothers, and lower-class Puerto Rican mothers living on the mainland U.S.

Middle-class Puerto Rican mothers living on the mainland U.S. were not sampled because this group tends to be more culturally assimilated than other Puerto Rican mothers living on either the mainland U.S. or in Puerto Rico.

All mothers had at least one child between the ages of 12 and 24 months.

## Procedure, Study 1

All mothers were interviewed individually in their native
languages by native speakers.

In Study 1, mothers were asked to describe:

(a) what qualities they would and would not like their children to possess as they grow older;

(b) a toddler they know who possesses some of those good qualities, and a toddler they know who possesses some of those negative qualities;

(c) how each of these toddlers would behave in a situation designed to simulate the preseparation, separation, and reunion episodes of the Strange Situation.

Mothers' responses were coded and analyzed for group differences. Ten culturally-relevant descriptors were selected on the basis of frequency counts: Independent, Secure, Involved with Learning, Has a Temper Tantrum if She Can't Get Her Own Way, Selfish, Stays out of Trouble, Calm, Obedient, Well-Brought Up, Affectionate. Six vignettes were constructed based on mothers' modal descriptions of desirable and undesirable Strange Situation behavior.

## Procedure, Study 2

All mothers were interviewed individually in their native language by native speakers.

In Study 2, mothers were read the six vignettes and asked to describe each toddler's personality, and why they would or would not want their own child to behave similarly.

In addition, mothers performed two ratings tasks and one ranking task:

(a) Mothers rated each toddler's desirability, typicality, and similarity to their own attachment-age child on a (1) to (9) scale.

(b) Mothers rated each toddler on the ten culturally-relevant descriptors selected on the basis of Study 1 on a (1) to (9) scale.

(c) Mothers rank-ordered the ten culturally-relevant descriptors in terms of how important she thought each was for her own child to possess.

## Results

(1) The Anglo mothers were more likely than the Puerto Rican mothers to generate responses reflecting concern with the development of personal competencies. In contrast, the Puerto Rican mothers were more likely to emphasize the maintenance of proper demeanor (respectfulness) in a public context.

(2) Consistent with their more individualistic orientation, the Anglo mothers rated active, independent infants higher in desirability than did the Puerto Rican mothers. In contrast, the Puerto Rican mothers rated quiet, affectionate infants higher in desirability than did the Anglo mothers.

(3) Mothers' ratings of the toddlers along the selected descriptors were consistent with their overall desirability ratings.

(4) Anglo mothers ranked <u>secure</u> as significantly more important than did Puerto Rican mothers. Puerto Rican mothers ranked <u>calm</u>, <u>obedient</u>, and <u>well-brought up</u> as significantly more important than did Anglo mothers.

All findings reported were obtained beyond SES.

## Conclusions

The results provide evidence that mothers' culturally-derived values influence the meanings they give to individual differences in Strange Situation behavior.

(1) Mothers focused on different dimensions of behavior in their conceptualizations of six hypothetical toddlers. In particular, Anglo mothers focused significantly more on the development of personal competencies, whereas the Puerto Rican mothers focused significantly more on the maintenance of proper demeanor.

(2) Cultural differences were obtained in mothers' preferences for differing patterns of Strange Situation behavior. Although all three groups of mothers showed a preference for Group B over Group A and C patterns, Anglo mothers rated the distal B1 and B2 toddlers more highly than did Puerto Rican mothers, whereas Puerto Rican mothers rated the proximal B4 toddler more highly than did Anglo mothers. This is consistent with the Anglo mothers' emphasis on the development of personal competencies, and the Puerto Rican mothers' emphasis on the maintenance of proper interpersonal relatedness.

## Conclusions, Cont'd

(3) Mothers' perceptions of the extent to which the toddlers possessed the ten culturally-relevant descriptors were skewed in the direction of their perception of each toddler's overall desirability. Specifically, consonant with their higher desirability ratings of the active, independent A1 and distal B toddlers, the Anglo mothers rated these toddlers in a more positive direction than did the Puerto Rican mothers on several of the ten descriptors. In contrast, the Puerto Rican mothers, consonant with their higher desirability ratings of the proximal B4 toddler, rated this toddler as more calm than did the Anglo mothers.

(4) The results support the claim that Anglo and Puerto Rican mothers' cultural backgrounds affect many of the values they hold regarding socialization. Consonant with the study predictions, both middle- and lower-class Anglo mothers placed significantly greater value than did the Puerto Rican mothers on a characteristic associated with the development of personal competencies (secure), and significantly less value on three characteristics associated with the maintenance of proper demeanor and respect (calm, obedient, and well-brought up).

## Mean Category Percentages for Open-Ended Conceptualizations of Toddlers

| | Anglo | | Puerto Rican | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Category | middle | lower | lower | p |
| | | A1 Toddler | | |
| Personal Dev't | 53.2% | 31.4% | 10.2% | ** |
| Self-Control | 4.1% | 8.5% | 3.2% | |
| Lovingness | 25.5% | 14.1% | 4.1% | * |
| Respectfulness | 9.4% | 21.3% | 69.3% | ** |
| | | B1 Toddler | | |
| Personal Dev't | 65.1% | 64.8% | 34.3% | ** |
| Self-Control | 2.7% | 1.8% | 0.0% | |
| Lovingness | 14.8% | 5.2% | 8.9% | |
| Respectfulness | 6.3% | 9.5% | 45.1% | ** |
| | | B2 Toddler | | |
| Personal Dev't | 57.6% | 52.8% | 35.0% | ** |
| Self-Control | 1.5% | 2.8% | 0.9% | |
| Lovingness | 27.1% | 14.2% | 16.0% | |
| Respectfulness | 4.2% | 11.5% | 35.0% | ** |
| | | B3 Toddler | | |
| Personal Dev't | 56.1% | 46.3% | 8.9% | ** |
| Self-Control | 0.1% | 0.1% | 0.0% | |
| Lovingness | 22.5% | 14.6% | 17.2% | |
| Respectfulness | 10.6% | 14.6% | 59.1% | ** |
| | | B4 Toddler | | |
| Personal Dev't | 77.1% | 61.6% | 41.9% | ** |
| Self-Control | 2.6% | 10.1% | 3.6% | |
| Lovingness | 6.8% | 11.5% | 25.2% | ** |
| Respectfulness | 0.0% | 0.1% | 7.6% | |

## Mean Category Percentages for Open-Ended Conceptualizations of Toddlers

| | Anglo | | Puerto Rican | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Category | middle | lower | lower | p |
| | | C1 Toddler | | |
| Personal Dev't | 33.6% | 23.3% | 19.0% | |
| Self-Control | 33.8% | 39.9% | 18.1% | ** |
| Lovingness | 10.9% | 4.9% | 7.2% | |
| Respectfulness | 3.6% | 14.4% | 43.5% | ** |